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SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS
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CG CJTF-101, POLAD, JICCENT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KDEM PGOV AF
SUBJECT: PHASE 3 VOTER REGISTRATION TAKES UP THE CHALLENGE

¶1. (SBU) The Independent Elections Commission (IEC) reports
that on December 13, the first day of Phase 3 voter
registration, 123 of 124 planned voter registration sites
opened. Some 7,000 Afghans in Farah, Zabul, Paktika, Khost,
Nangarhar, and Laghman provinces signed up to vote, with
turnout to date greatest in populous Nangarhar. The IEC will
move the unopened site, originally planned for Khaki Afghan
district in Zabul province, out of this area of Taliban
control to the closest bazaar, in Shah Joy district. The IEC
expects to open the alternative site in the next few days.

TALIBAN SAY NO, VOTERS SAY YES

¶2. (SBU) The Taliban on December 11 kidnapped two election
workers in Bakwah district Farah province. Local elders
secured their release the next day. The Taliban also fired
mortars near the voter registration site in Kanesk in Farah;
it is not clear whether the target was the voter site or
other nearby government facilities. Registration staff are
keeping both the Bakwah and Kanesk sites open and report
voters are registering there.

¶3. (SBU) The district field coordinator (DFC) in Mizan
district in Zabul on December 13 told PRT officers that
Taliban presence had limited his ability to conduct public
outreach. After one resident from a valley known as a
Taliban stronghold appeared in the district center and
obtained his new card, however, turnout picked up markedly.
In downtown Qalat, where PRT officers observed high spirits
at the two voter registration centers, a merry elder voter
fluffed his beard before his registration card photo.

¶4. (SBU) Threats from the Taliban prompted two successive
registration center teams to quit in Sabari district in
Khost. The Provincial Electoral Officer (PEO) has hired,
trained, and deployed a third team. In two districts in
Khost, the Taliban circulated letters threatening to "attack"
citizens who obtain voter registration cards.

¶5. (SBU) Police have detailed information on an election
worker kidnapped from his home December 13 by the Taliban in
Paktika province and are planning possible responses. Press
reports say the Taliban killed one of the six musicians
kidnapped at the same time; the Taliban spokesman claims the
victim died of a heart attack.

¶6. (SBU) Registration is underway without security
incidents in Laghman and Nangarhar. In Zabul, local police
arrested a district field coordinator (DFC) on charges of
theft, unrelated to his election responsibilities.

GETTING BETTER AND BETTER

¶7. (SBU) The IEC is demonstrating continued improvement in
its capabilities. Logistics, security cooperation, and
public outreach are much improved after initial stumbles in
Phase 1 in October. Logistics and security problems, for
example, meant sites opened late in the Phase 1 provinces of
Nuristan, Ghazni, Wardak, and Logar. For Phase 3, logistics
were fully arranged at all centers, and despite intimidation
in a number of areas, only the one Zabul site was prevented
from opening on day one. Deputy Chief Electoral Officer
Zekria Barakzai on December 14 commented that the IEC knows
that Phase 3, and subsequently Phase 4, will require it to
demonstrate flexibility and creativity to get the job done.

¶8. (SBU) Popular support remains an important factor in the
success of voter registration despite poor infrastructure,
inhospitable terrain, and threats from anti-government armed
forces. The governors of Khost and Farah staged media events
to encourage voters to register, including tribal elders,
religious leaders, and women to appeal to various sectors of
the public. In Laghman and Nangarhar, election workers are
supplementing the radio and TV media campaigns with meetings
with local elders. In Zabul, voter registration was the
topic of the Friday sermon. Election workers there have held
small community meetings and encouraged local mullahs to help
get out the vote. Kuchi leaders report they are rallying
their nomadic community as well.

WOOD